THORNS 71

Chapter 71: The Dorothy Twins

"And then he just disappeared, you say?"

"Like a fart in the wind."

Kurt told Emelie about what had happened between the king and Tobias at the castle all while ignoring the subtle glances of shock and envy they received from the people they walked past.

"... Who's that walking with Emelie?"

"... Is he a model?"

"... !! Is that her boy– Ow! Why'd you hit me?"

"Don't you know it's bad to make assumptions on things like that?! He could just be her servant for all we know!"

"... I was gonna say boytoy..."

"So the king is making his move then?" Emelie asked.

"Yeah. Said something about calling the Saintess and going to the church."

"T-The Saintess? They're here already?" There was almost what sounded like a moment of vulnerability in her voice when she asked him.

"Is something the matter?" Kurt titled his glass up to look at her.

"N-No.It’s nothing... Let’s focus on the topic at hand. I take it that all misunderstandings have been resolved?"

"Yes. And I appreciate you warning Diana. It’s thanks to her being there that I think the king decided not to throw me in a cell and called off my public lashings."

"Public lashings? The normal or enhanced version?"

"Enhanced. Is there a difference?"

"The short and sweet of it is, a normal lashing is just that. A normal lashing. It’ll hurt for sure but it’s nothing compared to an enhanced lashing. Those use a special whip, and the torturer will use strengthening magic to "enhance" the pain."

"Sounds like you’ve been on the end of both."

Emelie held her arm and looked at him with a saddened smile when she commented on his inferential statement. "That’s cause I have... So believe me when I say, you got lucky."

"I’m still getting punished for knocking out the prince though. The king said he’ll leave my punishment for that to him."

"Junior will decide your punishment? Then you have nothing to worry about. He’s nothing like his dad and will probably just give you a slap on the wrist then call it a day."

"Nice. By the way," Kurt’s tone went from lighthearted to serious. "During Tobias’ monologue, he revealed the secret of his freezing spell... Emelie,"

"Yes, I know. But you don’t have to worry about them killing those kids. Despite what he might’ve said, they don’t actually take all their blood to the point of death."

"But that guardsman died. And he looked so shriveled up."

"That’s because his blood wasn’t pure. Let me try to explain this in a simple way.

Children’s mana veins are still in development when they’re young. From the time they are born until the age of nine, they aren’t even able to manipulate mana let alone cast magic.

It’s only from ages ten and up will their mana veins fully acclimate to their entire being and their skills will start to manifest. By that point, they are either taken to schools or have private tutors teach them about how to control that mana.

The cult uses the blood of children under ten precisely because the mana flowing through them is still in its purest, undeveloped, state." Emelie explained.

"I see. It’s almost like... like they’re taking their blood, or mana should I say, and using it for their own means before it has the chance to develop into a skill.

So instead of it turning into, for example, a fire affinity, the cult uses the pure state of their mana to create their own spell that’ll make people freeze in place." Kurt hypothesised.

"Exactly. And because their mana is so pure, they only need a little."

"Dang... You sure know a lot about their inner workings."

"Well, in the past, I was a part of their ’brotherhood’. I told you before, I tried everything."

"So you know where those kids are being kept?"

"I–"

"Emelie Herst! What do you think you’re doing?!" A blue-haired female wearing Future Academy’s uniform suddenly appeared from above and stood in their way.

"Kiana? What do you mean? I’m not doing anything."

"Him!" Kiana pointed at Kurt. "What are you doing with that criminal!"

Kurt looked around to see who she was talking about. When he saw that there was nobody behind or beside himself, he pointed a finger at his chest and asked,

"Me?"

"Yes you! I’ve already told my father about what you did to Junior! I told you I wouldn’t forget!"

"Is that why you weren’t at the little gathering that Amber most likely organised. Did you and Junior go cry to daddy~? Hehehehe!" Emelie teased her.

"W-Why you *grrr!*"

"Sorry to burst your bubble, princess, but the king and I already settled that matter."

"What?! Then why are you still here and not rotting in a cell! Or better yet, dead!"

"The king said he’ll leave my punishment to the prince himself" Kurt shrugged.

"Dad said what about me?"

"And here comes another annoyance." Emelie sighed and shook her head.

Thud!

Maxwell, Jr., A.K.A., Junior, jumped from a nearby rooftop and landed heroically on one knee next to Kiana."

"Cool landing, prince. Very stylish." Kurt clapped in awe.

"Haha. Thank you, kind stranger. I do try to make an effort."

"Junior! That's the criminal who knocked you out! Focus!" Kiana screamed as she kicked his shin.

"Ow! What the hell, Kiana?! Knocked me out? What are you talking about?"

"HIM! HE DID! NEAR THE RIVER!"

"Near the river?" Junior rubbed his chin while looking at Kurt. "... Ohhhhh! Now I remember! To be honest, that incident had already completely slipped my mind."

"Wha– but Junior. He could've killed you..."

"I'm still alive, aren't I? I got a pretty thick skull."

"I'm glad you're alright, prince. I'm sorry for hitting you like that the other day. It was my mistake." Kurt apologised.

"It's all good dude. See Kiana, he even apologised."

"NO! That's not how this works! You are the future king of Eldoria! You cannot allow anybody to assault you like that! Especially to the point of knocking you out! Father said that he'll leave his punishment to you so punish him!"

"How 'bout a slap on the wrist?"

"NO!"

"Ergh! Kiaaana you know I’m not good with all this politicking." Junior dragged his foot across the ground. "I’d rather give the throne to big sister Jasmine. She’s all about politics and whatnot."

"You already celebrated your inauguration. Everyone knows that you’re going to be king in the future. Do not betray their expectations for you..."

"Expections... Feels like I was forced into the whole thing." He looked out at the city with a defeated smile.

"Junior..."

"Erhmmm. Can we leave now?" Emelie interrupted whatever moment the twins were having. "Kurt and I have places to be and you’re blocking the way. I’d really appreciate it if you moved your fat asses."

"Excuse you!" Kiana held her skirt down with a flushed face.

"No need to worry Kiana. I say we both got pretty flat asses."

"Pfffft Hehehe!" Kurt looked away and covered his mouth to try and keep his laughter from breaking out.

"How dare you..." But Kiana had already noticed.

"FINE! If Junior won’t punish you then I will!" She looked to her brother as if seeking approval

"I’m okay with that. As long as you don’t sentence him to death of course." Junior agreed.

"Good. Then the criminal and Emelie will face the two of us in a public duel. On the condition that if you lose, you'll have to grovel and lick our feet! As well as become our servant for the entire year!"

"Hey, why're you bring ME into this–"

"And if we win?" Kurt pulled Emelie back and stood in front of her.

"You won't win." Kiana shot him a smug look.

"Fine, but if we win, then we both get to publicly spank you. Clearly your father never taught you tough love and we'd be glad to teach you. Ain't that right Emy."

"I–!.... Publicly spanking the twins without any repercussions?" She was about to reject the duel since they had better things to do but,

"But opportunities don't come by this easily, hehehe. Fine! We accept!"

"Excellent! Meet us at Evergreen Park in one hour and don't be late! Let's go Junior."

"Ehhh! But I wanna hang out with these two. Kurt seems cool."

"No! We do not 'hang' with the enemies!" She took his hand and used her ice magic to jump into the air and fly away.

"See ya later Kurt! I promise to go easy on you, haha!" Junior let himself get dragged away and started waving at him.

"Wow. Someone's cocky." Kurt adjusted his glasses as he watched the beautiful trail left behind by Kiana's ice. "So off to Dominik?"

"Haaa... No. We need to go get you weapons. Follow me." She turned away from the main road and walked into a quieter street.

"Weapons? I'm pretty sure I can take them bare-handed. I knocked out Prince Junior pretty easily too."

"Don't underestimate the Dorothy's. They are the descendants of the King of Heroes after all. They are also part of the ten representatives. Not to mention, from what I heard and read, you caught Junior off guard. He'll be ready for you this time."

"Yeesh, I get it. Though I'm pretty sure that just you alone is enough to defeat them."

"Heh, naturally."

Chapter 72: New Weapons, New Me

Ring Ring

"Here, this place should work. Pick out what you like."

Emelie stood to the side of the weapons shop while she watched and waited for Kurt to choose what he'd buy.

"Holy shit..." Kurt looked around in wonder like a kid in a candy store. "Talk about peak male fantasy... this place is stacked."

"I tried picking a decently moderate place. I used to come here back when I was still a noob and didn't know how to properly use my magic."

"Still a noob? Ahh, I see. You talking about your early 'cycle' days?"

"Mmhm." She nodded once.

"So you don’t need weapons?"

"I’m a walking weapon. Does that count?"

"Heh, hardly." Kurt scoffed as he eyed and lifted up a broadblade. "I remember Dominik using these special cuffs on this green-haired chick. Awful temper that one. Anyways, I don’t exactly know how they function, but her magic wind abilities had all of a sudden stopped when he handcuffed her with it."

"They’re called mana blockers."

"Mana blockers?" He asked as he put the broadblade down and started fiddling with a pair of switch knives he picked up. "They sound effective if nothing else."

"Yeah well, the secret to those cuffs is not as complicated as the name implies. Instead of blocking your mana, the cuffs are actually made of the same material as mana stones. They are simply redirecting the mana of the apprehended into the cuffs which makes it seem like your mana is being blocked." Emelie explained.

"What are mana stones? Sorry I’m still new to pretty much anything and everything that involves magic."

"No need to apologise. Mana stones are special crystals which were discovered during the first invasion war. It’s a very dangerous material that would suck up and store any mana it comes into contact with.

Over the years, scientists and researchers have found ways to develop and manipulate these mana stones to make them more... let’s say friendly. Now, they are used as a source of power that enables society to function.

Think streetlamps, the lights in our homes, any appliances used in our daily life, and even the elevator inside of the hotel. They all use mana stones."

"Ahhh. But what about coal and electricity?" Kurt looked at her with slight concern.

"Coal and electricity? As a source of power? Pfffthahaha, talk about ancient!" She laughed at him as if he asked the dumbest question ever. "Mana stones are much more efficient. Much more eco-friendly too."

"...You make it sound like I was talking about dinosaurs." Kurt turned back to looking at the weapons.

"What's a dinosaur?"

"Huh–?"

"Who's making all that ruckus in my store on this here quiet afternoon!?" A short old man walked out from behind the counter.

Tsk "We weren't that loud. Besides, weren't you supposed to be out here to help out any potential customers instead of whatever you're doing at the back of the store?"

"Wait a minute? Aren't you that female student that everyone's been fussing about?" The old man adjusted his glasses and took a good look at Emelie.

"Well, I am a student, and I'm indeed a female. Glad to see your eyes are still working."

"What's with that attitude?! You there, eyepatch! Why's this little lady giving me attitude!?"

"I don't know." Kurt shrugged. "Must be on one of those special days."

"Special days? Ah! You mean her period!? Ha! No wonder she's so pissy! My old lady used to be just like you, ahahaha!"

"What the fuck is wrong with you screaming like that!?" Emelie pushed herself off the wall and grabbed the old man by the collar. "I'm not on my fucking period but I am starting to get a little pissy if you keep talking about me like that!"

"O-Okay! It was my mistake! Just put me down already!"

Emelie, who was subconsciously using her magic to lift the old man off the ground, let go of his collar, making him land flat on his behind.

"Good. Now help my friend get strapped up so that we can leave."

"Y-Y-Yes ma'am!" The old man bowed to Emelie and scurried his way to Kurt.

"How may I help you, dear customer?"

'Wow... What a change in behaviour. Poor old guy...' Kurt watched the nervous sweat drip from the old man's forehead as he stood and waited patiently, yet not so patiently, in front of him.

"S-Sir?"

"Yes. Haha, sorry about my friend. As for what I'd like, these switch knives are really cool but not my style. Do you have something more durable that can make me more flexible during combat? I'm a free flow type of fighter. Being restricted to just using knives would limit me."

"Durable yet flexible?" The old man began to think. "Hmm. Oh, I know just the thing for you."

He then walked over and grabbed a box from behind the counter.

"These are brass-knuckle switch knives. As the name implies, you can easily switch between hand-to-hand combat using the brass knuckles or switch things up to using the knives. The only downside to these is that it's practically two weapons in one, making them a bit on the heavier side. Made out of titanium, you will find that it is highly durable."

"These feel good." Kurt started shadow boxing and swingling the knife around the air. "What's it doing behind the counter and not on the front shelf?"

"That’s due to its popularity... People prefer one or the other. Not both of them meshed together like this."

"There’s also the fact that most people prefer traditional weaponry ranging from the obvious choice being a sword, all the way down to the bow for archers." Emelie added a bit more context.

"So no one buys these?" Kurt asked as he put the knives back in the box.

"I guess there a few weido– I MEAN– rare customers like who do. Speaking of which, will you be purchasing them? If you do, I’ll throw in a special leather belt in which you can store them in."

"Oh, now I have to buy them. Can’t miss out on the free belt now can I?"

"Excellent choice!" The old man clapped his hands on the deal struck. "I’ll have your items ready in a few. Is that all you’re interested in?"

"No. I’d actually like a secondary sword weapon."

"A sword as your secondary weapon? You really are weird– I MEAN– rare..."

"Haha, it’s ok old man. You can call him weird. I think he fully recognises it." Emelie spoke up from the front door.

"I-I would never speak ill of a paying customer! W-What kind of sword are you looking for, sir?"

"Hmm, since you have these cool brass-knuckle switch knives, I’m gonna shoot for the fences and ask if you have anything sleek but durable. I want it to rest comfortably on my hips and should be easily drawn at any time."

"My my, you certainly ask for the most contradictory things. But I do like a customer who knows what he wants, hehehe... *slrrp* Wait right here, dear customer."

’Ayoo... Wipe that drool away while you’re back there.’ Kurt looked at him with the stink eye.

"This... is Silent Night." The old man came back shortly after and unsheathed a sleek black blade.

"Made out of alloy steel, it can withstand nearly anything you put it through. I’ve specifically crafted this one to look as plain as possible so as to catch anyone it cuts off guard. Due to its hilt not having any side rings, it can easily fit on your hip without any discomfort and, as you’ve requested, can be easily drawn at any time."

Kurt picked up the sword and gave it a few light swings while getting the feeling of it in both his hands.

"I’m really liking this. Hell, I might even buy this. The way it doesn’t shine in the light is what’s really doing it for me."

"I’m glad you noticed this little feature, dear customer. That’s because I’ve coated it with a special magic liquid that allows it to absorb any light refracted onto it rather than reflect it."

"It absorbs light?" Kurt stopped swinging the blade around. "Doesn’t that mean it’ll get extremely hot?"

"No need to worry. Part of the magic coating is to stop that from happening."

"I see. In that case I’ll take it." Kurt sheathed the blade back and gave it to the old man.

"Excellent!" He clapped again. "By the way, is there anything more you’d like?" He looked at Kurt with starry eyes.

"Just two things. Fingerless black gloves and a small whetstone. I like sharpening my blade on the go."

"I’ll have all your items in a moment! Please wait for me by the counter, dear customer."

The whole transaction took about 10 minutes. Kurt equipped his leather belt and slid his two new knives in its special holsters, as well as his new sword and whetstone. He then tugged in his new gloves on his hands and once he was ready, he paid the old man his dues and walked to the door where Emelie was waiting.

"Hmph. I must say you look pretty cool with those weapons and gloves." Emelie gave him a once over and smiled with approval.

"Thank you, Emy. I try to put in the effort." Kurt adjusted his glasses once they stepped out of the store. "So, to Evergreen Park?" He asked her.

"To Evergreen Park." She nodded.